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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF INTOLERANCE AND OF DISCRIMINATION BASED ON RELIGION OR BELIEF

Written statement submitted by the International Association of Educators for World Peace, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[13 March 1997]

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1. Religious freedom is generally regarded as a basic human right which if suppressed results in grave consequences for the preservation and continuation of a rich cultural heritage and tradition. In many cases, religion becomes the very base of a culture and its approach to the universe and its habitants. Therefore, international human rights instruments, notably the International Covenants on Human Rights and United Nations conventions, place great importance on the respect for religious belief and freedom.

2. China, being a signatory to a number of United Nations conventions and as a member of the Commission on Human Rights, has obligations to respect religious freedom and not to suppress it. However, the Chinese authorities have not only failed to respect religious freedom in Tibet but also use religion as a tool to distort an ancient philosophy and procedures. On 26 November 1996, Xizang Ribao, an official Chinese newspaper in Tibet said:

> "... the influence of religion and traditional concepts are especially serious. Some cadres and people, instead of fostering lofty communist ideals, regard religious belief as their spiritual pillar; they have no faith in that only under the communist party's leadership and by taking the socialist road can a free, happy life become a reality, but regard turning of the wheel (of Tibetan Buddhism) and burning the incense as the 'magic medicine' for freeing oneself from suffering; they do not rely on science and civilization to transform the objective world, but use religion or superstitious ideas to obstruct the exploitation and utilization of resources; they do not use their wisdom and strength to serve the community and benefit the people, but waste their precious time to pursue the illusory next life; they do not use the limited financial resources to develop production, shake off poverty and become well off, but generously donate them to lamaseries; and they do not let their children receive modern education and become useful people of the country but send them to lamaseries to become monks and nuns."

3. Religious freedom remains severely restricted in Tibet in recent years due to numerous policy directives implemented by the Chinese authorities. These include the anti-Dalai Lama campaign; the ban on photographs of the Dalai Lama all over Tibet; interference in the recognition of the eleventh Panchen Lama of Tibet; a ban on major religious festivals like the Great Prayer Festival of Lhasa; the "Strike Hard-Patriotic Re-education" campaign in monasteries and nunneries; and the "Last Battle" against the Dalai Lama.

4. Unable to break the determined devotion and loyalty of the Tibetan people to the Dalai Lama for more than 40 years, the Chinese authorities launched an unprecedented anti-Dalai Lama campaign after holding the "Third National Forum on Work in Tibet" at Beijing in 1994. Vitriolic attacks on the Dalai Lama subsequently appeared in materials used for political education and in January 1995, the campaign was publicly launched in the official media. By this time what was unusual was not the violence of the language used, but the

fact that it criticized the Dalai Lama on religious rather than political grounds. For the first time since 1979, the polemic attacked his religious standing and suitability for leadership:

> "The purpose of Buddhism is to deliver all living creatures in a peaceful manner. Now the Dalai and his clique have violated the religious doctrine and even have spread rumours to fool and incite one people against the other, in what way can he be regarded as a spiritual leader? ... As for Dalai, he has always incorporated 'Tibet Independence' into the doctrines which he preaches in his sermons, ... wildly attempting to use godly strength to poison and bewitch his masses ... Such flagrant deceptiveness and demagoguery constitute a blasphemy to Buddhism." 1/

5. In a further attempt to alienate the Dalai Lama from his people, on 26 January 1996, an order was issued by the Department of Culture of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" to remove all photographs of the Dalai Lama from Norbulingka and the Potala Palace in Lhasa. The ban was eventually extended to all public institutions and private homes in Tibet. On 7 May 1996, a Chinese "work team" (gongzuo dui) arrived at Gaden monastery near Lhasa, tasked with removing all photographs of the Dalai Lama. The monks refused to cooperate, sparking off a riot. One monk, Kelsang Nyendrak, died after being shot by the Chinese authorities, and five other monks, including 14-year-old Gelek Jinpen, received bullet wounds. Reports attest to the arrest of 85 to 90. A few months later a number of monks were expelled as "fugitives". 2/ The monastery was closed for six months following the above incident.

6. As regards the disappearance of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, the eleventh Panchen Lama of Tibet, China, after more than a year of denials, finally admitted to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, that the boy was in Beijing's custody. However, China continues to refuse to declare publicly the whereabouts of Gedhun Choekyi Nyima, his parents and Chadrel Rinpoche, the former abbot of Tashi Lhunpo monastery, the seat of the Panchen Lamas in central Tibet. The International Association of Educators remain deeply concerned about the incommunicado detention of this important child who is the second highest spiritual leader of the Tibetan people.

7. In April 1996, China launched the "Strike Hard or Crack Down Severely On Crimes" campaign, targeted at crushing corruption and crime. Within Tibet Chinese authorities have focused on "splittists" - individuals who support Tibetan independence and the leadership of the Dalai Lama. The main sub-campaign of "Strike Hard" within Tibet is the so-called "Patriotic Re-education Campaign" and followed from earlier campaigns, such as that of banning photographs of the Dalai Lama, which aimed to stifle politically active monks and nuns. The "Patriotic Re-education Campaign" in Tibet has led to widespread arrests and expulsions of monks and nuns who have refused to be "re-educated" along Chinese communist lines.

8. The re-education campaign was conducted by work teams who entered monasteries and nunneries to force monks and nuns to renounce Tibetan independence, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Gedhun Choeyki Nyima and the Panchen Lama. At Drepung monastery, near Lhasa, for example, 180 communist cadres were involved in the re-education sessions which began on 1 August 1996. Some of the propaganda materials released for this campaign included the following:

A Brief Explanation and Proclamation on Tibetan History
A Brief Explanation and Proclamation on Opposing Splittism
A Brief Explanation on Legal Knowledge
A Brief Explanation and Proclamation on Religious Policy.

9. Human rights groups and other sources report more than 110 arrests and at least two deaths since China launched the campaign. Twenty-four of the arrests were a direct result of monks questioning a work team's form of education. Tenchok Tenphel, a 27-year-old monk, was reportedly arrested at Sakya monastery on 1 September 1996 in front of a re-education session. He died on 14 September at Sakya district prison. Although the Chinese authorities said that he died by "committing suicide", Tibetans allege that he had died as a result of torture in prison.

10. Another grave consequence of the above campaign in Tibet is the expulsion of monks who refused to accept the Chinese policy. According to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in India, 1,295 monks were expelled in 1996. Many of the expelled monks have fled to India and Nepal in recent months. "Those with a bad attitude to the studying and those with poor results or deliberately causing obstacles to the study will be severely criticized and their right to remain among the numbers of monks will be struck out," said an official notice handed to each monk at Sera monastery in mid-June 1996.

11. In January 1996, the Chinese authorities warned: "Those who make use of religion to interfere with administrative, judicial, martial, educational and other social affairs, especially those who take advantage of religious reasons to split the country, must be severely cracked down upon according to law." 3/ Three immediate tasks were identified in order to "clean-up problems in religion" in 1996: to order all places of worship to register; to deal with difficult religious problems of public concern; and to cultivate contingents of young patriotic religious preachers. In November 1996, the Chinese authorities launched another campaign called "Last Battle" against the Dalai Lama, aimed at eradicating any vestiges of the Dalai Lama's influence from all levels of society. Their report stipulated that the anti-splittist campaign, launched in the region's monasteries this year, must be broadened and signalled the adoption of "administrative measures to resolve the uncontrolled proliferation of religious festivals and shrines". The report by the "Tibet Central Committee" of the so-called "Tibet Autonomous Region" stressed the strengthening of controls over daily life in the region which must also involve the close supervision of literature and the arts to ensure that they fulfil the socialist role of "serving the people" rather than propagating "spiritual garbage".

12. The above situation clearly shows that the Chinese authorities continue to impose severe restrictions on freedom of religion in Tibet and that the overall situation of human rights there has deteriorated in the past few years. The International Association of Educators for World Peace urgently appeals to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to adopt a resolution condemning China for its dismal human rights record in Tibet.

Notes

1/ "Clearly understand the true nature of the Dalai clique, oppose splittism and safeguard stability", Xizang Ribao (Tibet daily), 10 March 1995.

2/ Tibet-One More Year of Political Repression, 1996 Annual Report-Human Rights in Tibet, Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Dharamsala, India, February 1997.

3/ Chinese State Councillor Ismail Amat, quoted by Xinhua News Agency.